

*H. P. Buddicom*

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OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP  
OF  
ST. PAUL.

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CONVERSION

ST. PAUL



OBSERVATIONS  
ON THE  
CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP  
OF  
*ST. PAUL.*  
IN A  
LETTER  
TO  
GILBERT WEST, Esq.

——  
BY THE LATE RIGHT HON.  
GEORGE LORD LYTTTELTON.

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A

# LETTER

TO

GILBERT WEST, Esq.

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SIR,

IN a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you, that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the *Old Testament*, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the *Jewish* religion, from the miracles of *Christ*, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other Apostles; I thought the conversion and the Apostleship of *St. Paul* alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient

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cient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation.

As you seemed to think that so compendious a proof might be of use to convince those unbelievers that will not attend to a longer series of arguments, I have thrown together the reasons upon which I support that proposition.

In the 26th chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, writ by a cotemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the Gospel, as appears by the book itself, ch. xx. ver. 6, 13, 14. xxvii. 1. &c. St. Paul is said to have given himself this account of his conversion and preaching, to King Agrippa and Festus the Roman governor: ‘My manner of life from my youth, which was, at the first, among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning (if they would testify) that after the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers: unto which promise our

,twelve

twelve tribes, instantly serving God day  
 and night, hope to come; for which  
 hope's sake, King *Agrippa*, I am accused  
 by the *Jews*. Why should it be thought  
 a thing incredible with you, that God  
 should raise the dead? I verily thought  
 with myself, that I ought to do many  
 things contrary to the name of *Jesus* of  
*Nazareth*. Which thing I also did in  
*Jerusalem*, and many of the saints did I  
 shut up in prison, having received autho-  
 rity from the chief priests; and when they  
 were put to death, I gave my voice against  
 them. And I punished them oft in every  
 synagogue, and compelled them to blas-  
 pheme, and being exceedingly mad against  
 them, I persecuted them even unto strange  
 cities. Whereupon as I went to *Damascus*  
 with authority and commission from the  
 chief priests, at mid-day, O King, I saw  
 in the way a light from heaven, above the  
 brightness of the sun, shining round about  
 me, and them which journeyed with me.  
 And when we were all fallen to the earth,  
 I heard a voice speaking unto me, and



“ saying in the *Hebrew* tongue, *Saul, Saul,*  
“ why persecutest thou me? It is hard for  
“ thee to kick against the pricks. And I  
“ said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said,  
“ I am *Jesus* whom thou persecutest. But  
“ rise, stand upon thy feet; for I have ap-  
“ peared unto thee for this purpose, to make  
“ thee a minister, and a witness both of those  
“ things which thou hast seen, and of those  
“ things in the which I will appear unto  
“ thee; delivering thee from the people,  
“ and from the *Gentiles*, unto whom I now  
“ send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn  
“ them from darkness to light, and from the  
“ power of Satan unto God, that they may  
“ receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance  
“ among them which are sanctified by faith  
“ that is in me. Whereupon, O King  
“ *Agrippa*, I was not disobedient to the hea-  
“ venly vision: but shewed first unto them  
“ of *Damascus*, and at *Jerusalem*, and through-  
“ out all the coast of *Judea*, and to the *Gen-*  
“ *tiles*, that they should repent and turn to  
“ God, and do works meet for repentance.  
“ For these causes the *Jews* caught me in  
“ the

the temple, and went about to kill me.  
 Having therefore obtained help of God, I  
 continue unto this day witnessing both to  
 small and great, saying none other things  
 than those which *Moses* and the prophets  
 did say should come: that *Christ* should  
 suffer, and that he should be the first that  
 should rise from the dead, and should  
 shew light to the people, and to the *Gen-*  
*tiles*. And as he thus spake for himself,  
*Festus* said with a loud voice, *Paul*, thou  
 art beside thyself; much learning doth  
 make thee mad. But he said, I am not  
 mad, most noble *Festus*, but speak forth  
 the words of truth and soberness. For  
 the King knoweth of these things, before  
 whom also I speak freely; for I am per-  
 suaded that none of these things are hidden  
 from him; for this thing was not done in  
 a corner. King *Agrippa*, believest thou  
 the prophets? I know that thou believest.  
 —Then *Agrippa* said unto *Paul*, almost  
 thou persuadest me to be a Christian.  
 And *Paul* said, I would to God that not only  
 thou, but also all that hear me this day,

6      *Observations on the Conversion*

‘ were both almost and altogether such as  
 ‘ I am, except these bonds \*.’ In another  
 chapter of the same book he gives in sub-  
 stance the same account to the *Jews*, adding  
 these further particulars: ‘ And I said,  
 ‘ What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord  
 ‘ said unto me, Arise, and go into *Damascus*,  
 ‘ and there it shall be told thee of all things  
 ‘ which are appointed for thee to do. And  
 ‘ when I could not see for the glory of that  
 ‘ light, being led by the hand of them that  
 ‘ were with me, I came into *Damascus*.  
 ‘ And one *Ananias*, a devout man accord-  
 ‘ ing to the law, having a good report of  
 ‘ all the *Jews* that dwelt there, came unto  
 ‘ me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother  
 ‘ *Saul*, receive thy sight; and the same  
 ‘ hour I looked up upon him. And he  
 ‘ said, The God of our fathers hath chosen  
 ‘ thee, that thou should’st know his will,  
 ‘ and see that Just One, and should’st hear  
 ‘ the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be  
 ‘ his witness unto all men of what thou hast

\* Acts xxii. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

‘ seen

‘ seen and heard. And now why tarriest  
 ‘ thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash  
 ‘ away thy sins, calling on the name of the  
 ‘ Lord.’

In the IXth chapter of the same book, the author of it relates the same story, with some other circumstances not mentioned in these accounts: as, that *Saul in a vision saw Ananias* before he came to him, *coming in, and putting his hand upon him that he might receive his sight* \*. And that when *Ananias* had spoken to him, *immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales* †.

And agreeably to all these accounts, St. Paul thus speaks of himself in the epistles he wrote to the several churches he planted; the authenticity of which cannot be doubted without overturning all rules, by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved, or confirmed.

To the *Galatians* he says: ‘ I certify  
 ‘ you, brethren, that the gospel which was  
 ‘ preached by me is not after man. For I

\* Acts ix. 12.

† Acts, *ibid.* ver. 18.



' neither received it of man, neither was I  
 ' taught it, but by the revelation of *Jesus*  
 ' *Christ*. For ye have heard of my con-  
 ' version in time past in the *Jews* religion,  
 ' how that beyond measure I persecuted the  
 ' church of God, and wasted it. And pro-  
 ' fitted in the *Jews* religion above many  
 ' mine equals in my own nation, being  
 ' more exceedingly zealous of the tradi-  
 ' tions of my fathers. But when it pleased  
 ' God, who separated me from my mother's  
 ' womb, and called me by his grace, to  
 ' reveal his Son in me, that I might preach  
 ' him among the heathen, immediately I  
 ' conferred not with flesh and blood, &c \*.'

To the *Philippians* he says, ' If any other  
 ' man thinketh that he hath whereof he  
 ' might trust in the flesh, I more: circum-  
 ' cised the eighth day, of the stock of *Israel*,  
 ' of the tribe of *Benjamin*, an *Hebrew* of  
 ' the *Hebrews*. As touching the law, a  
 ' *Pharisee*; concerning zeal, persecuting  
 ' the church; touching the righteousness

\* Gal. i. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

' which



‘ which is in the law, blameless. But what  
 ‘ things were gain to me, those I counted  
 ‘ loss for *Christ*. Yea doubtless, and I count  
 ‘ all things but loss for the excellency of  
 ‘ the knowledge of *Christ Jesus* my Lord,  
 ‘ for whom I have suffered the loss of all  
 ‘ things, and do count them but dung,  
 ‘ that I may win *Christ*\*.’

And in his epistle to *Timothy* he writes  
 thus: ‘ I thank *Jesus Christ* our Lord, who  
 ‘ hath enabled me, for that he counted me  
 ‘ faithful, putting me into the ministry,  
 ‘ who was before a blasphemer, and a per-  
 ‘ secutor, and injurious; but I obtained  
 ‘ mercy, because I did it ignorantly in un-  
 ‘ belief†.’

In other epistles he calls himself an *Apostle*  
 by the will of God, by the commandments  
 of God our Saviour, and Lord *Jesus Christ*;  
 —and an *Apostle* not of men, neither by men,  
 but by *Jesus Christ*, and God the Father, who  
 raised him from the dead‡. All which im-

\* Phil. iii. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

† 1 Tim. i. 12, 13.

‡ 2 Cor. i. 1. Col. i. 1. 1 Tim. i. 1. Gal. i. 1.

plies some miraculous call that made him an Apostle. And to the *Corinthians* he says, after enumerating many appearances of *Jesus* after his resurrection, ‘ And last of all he  
‘ was seen of me also, as of one born out of  
‘ due time \*.’

Now it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentick a manner, either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others, and all that he said must be imputed to the power of that deceit; or what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.

Now that he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent

\* 1 Cor. xv. 8.

to deceive, I shall endeavour to prove, by shewing that he could have no rational motives to undertake such an imposture, nor could have possibly carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed.

First then, the inducement to such an imposture must have been one of these two, either the hope of advancing himself by it in his temporal interest, credit or power; or the gratification of some of his passions under the authority of it, and by the means it afforded.

Now these were the circumstances in which St. Paul declared his conversion to the faith of *Christ Jesus*. That *Jesus*, who called himself the *Messiah*, and Son of God, notwithstanding the innocence and holiness of his life, notwithstanding the miracles by which he attested his mission, had been crucified by the *Jews* as an impostor and blasphemer; which crucifixion not only must (humanly speaking) have intimidated others from following him, or espousing his doctrines, but served to confirm the *Jews* in

their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who according to all their prejudices was not to suffer in any manner, but to reign triumphant for ever here upon earth. His apostles indeed, though at first they appeared to be terrified by the death of their master, and disappointed in all their hopes, yet had surprisingly recovered their spirits again, and publickly taught in his name, declaring him to be risen from the grave, and confirming that miracle by many they worked, or pretended to work themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the *Jews* were so far from being converted either by their words or their works, that they had begun a severe persecution against them, put some to death, imprisoned others, and were going on with implacable rage against the whole sect. In all these severities *St. Paul* concurred, being himself a pharisee, *bred up at the feet of Gamaliel* \*, one of the chief of that sect; nor was he content in the heat of his zeal

\* *Acts* vii. 9, 22, 23.



with persecuting the Christians who were at Jerusalem, but breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem \*. His request was complied with, and he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the high priest †. At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, did he become a Disciple of Christ. What could be his motives to take such a part? Was it the hope of increasing his wealth? The certain consequence of his taking that part was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more. Those whom he left, were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power in Judea: those whom he went to, were indigent men, oppressed and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. They among them who had more than the rest,

\* Acts ix, 1, 2.

† Acts xxvi, 12.



shared what they had with their brethren, but with this assistance the whole community was hardly supplied with the necessaries of life. And even in the Churches he afterwards planted himself, which were much more wealthy than that of *Jerusalem*, so far was *St. Paul* from availing himself of their charity, or the veneration they had for him, in order to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it for the necessaries of life.

Thus he tells the *Corinthians*, ‘ Even unto  
 ‘ this present hour we both hunger and  
 ‘ thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted,  
 ‘ and have no certain dwelling-place, and  
 ‘ labour, working with our own hands \*.’

In another Epistle he writes to them,  
 ‘ Behold the third time I am ready to come  
 ‘ to you, and I will not be burthensome to  
 ‘ you, for I seek not yours but you; for  
 ‘ the children ought not to lay up for the  
 ‘ parents, but the parents for the children †.’

\* 1 Cor. xv. 8.

† 2 Cor. xii. 14.

To the *Thessalonians* he says, ' As we  
 ' were allowed of God to be put in trust  
 ' with the Gospel, even so we speak, not  
 ' as pleasing men, but God, which trieth  
 ' our hearts. For neither at any time used  
 ' we flattering words, nor a cloak of covet-  
 ' ousness, God is witness; nor of men sought  
 ' we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others,  
 ' when we might have been burthensome, as  
 ' the Apostles of *Christ*. For ye remember,  
 ' brethren, our labour and travel: for la-  
 ' bouring night and day, because we would  
 ' not be chargeable to any of you, we  
 ' preached unto you the Gospel of God \*.'  
 And again in another letter to them he re-  
 peats the same testimony of his disinterest-  
 edness: ' Neither did we eat any man's  
 ' bread for nought, but wrought with la-  
 ' bour and travel night and day, that we  
 ' might not be chargeable to any of you †.'  
 And when he took his farewell of the church  
 of *Ephesus*, to whom he foretold that they  
 should see him no more, he gives this tes-

\* 1 Theff. ii. 4, 5, 6, 9. † 2 Theff. iii. 8.

timony of himself, and appeals to them for the truth of it; 'I have coveted no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me \*.' It is then evident, both from the state of the church when *St. Paul* first came into it, and from his behaviour afterwards, that he had no thoughts of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian; whereas, by continuing to be their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune by the favour of those who were at the head of the *Jewish* state, to whom nothing could more recommend him than the zeal that he shewed in that persecution. As to credit or reputation, that too lay all on the side he forsook. The sect he embraced was under the greatest and most universal contempt of any then in the world. The chiefs and leaders of it were men of the lowest birth, education, and rank. They had no one advantage of

\* Acts xx. 33, 34.

parts or learning, or other human endowments to recommend them. The doctrines they taught were contrary to those, which they who were accounted the wisest and the most knowing of their nation professed. The wonderful works that they did, were either imputed to magick or to imposture. The very author and head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal, and died on the cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel think he should gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a college of Fishermen? Could he flatter himself, that either in or out of *Judea* the doctrines he taught could do him any honour? No; he knew very well that the preaching *Christ crucified was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness*. He afterwards found by experience, that in all parts of the world, contempt was the portion of whoever engaged in preaching a mystery so unpalatable to the world, to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcilable to the pride of human reason. *We are made* (says he



he to the *Corinthians*) as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things unto this day. Yet he went on as zealously as he set out, and was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Certainly then the desire of glory, the ambition of making to himself a great name, was not his motive to embrace Christianity. Was it then the love of power? power! over whom? over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter, whose shepherd himself had been murdered a little before. All he could hope from that power was to be marked out in a particular manner for the same knife, which he had seen so bloodily drawn against them. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and the rulers, than they had shewn to Jesus himself? Would not their anger be probably fiercer against the deserter and betrayer of their cause, than against any other of the Apostles? Was power over so mean and despised a set of men worth the attempting with so much danger? But still it may be said, there are some natures so fond of power, that they will court it at any risk, and be pleased with  
with



with it even over the meanest. Let us see then what power Saint *Paul* assumed over the Christians. Did he pretend to any superiority over the other Apostles? No; he declared himself *the least of them*, and *less than the least of all saints* \*. Even in the churches he planted himself, he never pretended to any primacy or power above the other Apostles: nor would he be regarded any otherwise by them, than as the instrument to them of the grace of God, and preacher of the Gospel, not as the head of a sect. To the *Corinthians* he writes in these words: ‘ Now this I say, that every one of  
 ‘ you saith, I am of *Paul*, and I of *Apollos*,  
 ‘ and I of *Cephas*, and I of *Christ*. Is  
 ‘ *Christ* divided? Was *Paul* crucified for  
 ‘ you? Or were ye baptized in the name of  
 ‘ *Paul* †?’ And in another place, ‘ Who then  
 ‘ is *Paul*, and who is *Apollos*, but ministers  
 ‘ by whom ye believed, even as the Lord  
 ‘ gave to every man? For we preach not

\* Ephes. iii. 8. 1 Cor. xv. 9.

† 1 Cor. i. 12, 13.

‘ ourselves,

\* ourselves, but *Christ Jesus* the Lord, and  
 \* ourselves *your servants* for *Jesus* sake \*.

All the authority he exercised over them was purely of a spiritual nature, tending to their instruction and edification, without any mixture of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find his account. Such was the dominion acquired and exercised through the pretence of Divine inspiration, by many ancient legislators, by *Minos*, *Radamanthus*, *Triptolemus*, *Lycurgus*, *Numa*, *Zaleucus*, *Zoroaster*, *Zamolxis*, nay even by *Pythagoras*, who joined legislation to his philosophy, and, like the others, pretended to miracles and revelations from God, to give a more venerable sanction to the laws he prescribed. Such, in later times, was attained by *Odin* among the *Goths*, by *Mahomet* among the *Arabians*, by *Mango Copac* among the *Peruvians*, by the *Sofi* family among the *Persians*, and that of the *Xeriffs* among the *Moors*. To such a dominion did also aspire the many false

\* 1 Cor. iii. 5. 2 Cor. iv. 5.

Messiahs among the *Jews*. In short, a spiritual authority was only desired as a foundation for temporal power, or as the support of it, by all these pretenders to divine inspirations, and others whom history mentions in different ages and countries, to have used the same arts. But *St. Paul* innovated nothing in government or civil affairs; he meddled not with legislation, he formed no commonwealths, he raised no seditions, he affected no temporal power. Obedience to their rulers was the doctrine he taught to the churches he planted\*, and what he taught he practised himself; nor did he use any of those soothing arts by which ambitious and cunning men recommend themselves to the favour of those whom they endeavour to subject to their power. Whatever was wrong in the disciples under his care, he freely reproved, as it became a teacher from God, of which numberless instances are to be found in all his *Epistles*. And he was as careful of them when he had

\* Rom. xiii.

left them, as while he resided among them, which an impostor would hardly have been, whose ends were centered all in himself. This is the manner in which he writes to the *Philippians*: ‘Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.’ *Phil. ii. 12.* And a little after he adds the cause why he interested himself so much in their conduct, ‘that ye may be blameless and harmless, the Sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of *Christ*, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered up on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all.’ Are these the words of an impostor desiring nothing but temporal power? No, they are evidently written by one who

\* *Phil. ii. 15, 16, 17.*



looked beyond the bounds of this life. But it may be said, that he affected at least an absolute spiritual power over the churches he formed. I answer, *he preached Christ Jesus and not himself. Christ was the head, he only the minister, and for such only he gave himself to them. He called those who assisted him in preaching the Gospel, his fellow-labourers and fellow-servants.*

So far was he from taking any advantage of a higher education, superior learning, and more use of the world, to claim to himself any supremacy above the other Apostles, that he made light of all those attainments, and declared, *that he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to nothing among those he converted save Jesus Christ, and him crucified\**. And the reason he gave for it was, *That their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* Now this conduct put him quite on a level with the other Apostles, who knew *Jesus Christ*, as well as he, and

\* 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2, 5.



had the power of God going along with their preaching in an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor, whose aim had been power, would have acted a contrary part; he would have availed himself of all those advantages, he would have extolled them as highly as possible, he would have set up himself, by virtue of them, as head of that sect to which he acceded, or at least of the profelytes made by himself. This is no more than was done by every philosopher who formed a school; much more was it natural in one who propagated a new religion.

We see that the bishops of *Rome* have claimed to themselves a primacy, or rather a monarchy over the whole Christian church. If *St. Paul* had been actuated by the same lust of dominion, it was much easier for him to have succeeded in such an attempt. It was much easier for him to make himself head of a few poor mechanicks and fishermen, whose superior he had always been in the eyes of the world, than for the bishops of *Rome* to reduce those of *Ravenna*  
or

or *Milan*, and other great Metropolitans, to their obedience. Besides the opposition they met with from such potent antagonists, they were obliged to support their pretensions in direct contradiction to those very Scriptures which they were forced to ground them upon, and to the indisputable practice of the whole Christian church for many centuries. These were such difficulties as required the utmost abilities and skill to surmount. But the first preachers of the Gospel had easier means to corrupt a faith not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known by what they severally published themselves. It was necessary indeed while they continued together, and taught the same people, that they should agree, otherwise the credit of their sect would have been overthrown; but when they separated, and formed different churches in distant countries, the same necessity no longer remained.

It was in the power of St. *Paul* to model most of the churches he formed, so as to favour his own ambition: for he preached

the Gospel in parts of the world where no other Apostles had been, *where Christ was not named* till he brought the knowledge of him, avoiding *to build upon another man's foundation* \*. Now had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to just the same Gospel as was delivered by the other Apostles, where he had such a latitude to preach what he pleased without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and warped the doctrines of *Christ* to his own ends, to the particular use and expediency of his own followers, and to the peculiar support and increase of his own power? That this was not done by *St. Paul*, or by any other of the Apostles, in so many various parts of the world as they travelled into, and in churches absolutely under their own direction; that the Gospel preached by them all should be one and the same †, the

\* Rom. xv. 20.

† If any one imagines that he sees any difference between the doctrines of *St. James* and *St. Paul*, concerning justification by faith or by works, let him read *Mr.*

*Locke's*

the doctrines agreeing in every particular, without any one of them attributing more to himself than he did to the others, or establishing

*Locke's excellent Comment upon the Epistles of the latter; or let him only consider these words in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, c. ix. v. 27. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.*

If St. Paul had believed or taught, that faith without works was sufficient to save a disciple of Christ, to what purpose did he *keep under his body*, since his Salvation was not to depend upon *that*, being subject to the power of his reason, but merely upon the *faith* he professed? His *faith* was firm, and so strongly founded upon the most certain conviction, that he had no reason to doubt its continuance; how could he then think it possible, that while he retained that *saving faith*, he might nevertheless *be a cast away*? Or if he had supposed that his *election* and *calling* was of such a nature, as that it *irresistibly* impelled him to good, and restrained him from evil, how could he express any fear, lest the lust of his body should prevent his Salvation? Can such an apprehension be made to agree with the notions of absolute predestination ascribed by some to St. Paul? He could have no doubt that the *Grace of God* had been given to him in the most extraordinary manner; yet we see, that he thought his



establiſhing any thing even in point of order or diſcipline different from the reſt, or more advantageous to his own intereſt, credit, or power, is a moſt ſtrong and convincing proof of their not being impoſtors, but acting entirely by Divine inſpiration.

If, then, it appears that St. *Paul* had nothing to gain by taking this part, let us conſider, on the other hand, what he gave up, and what he had reaſon to fear. He gave up a fortune which he was then in a fair way of advancing. He gave up that reputation which he had acquired by the labours and ſtudies of his whole life, and by a behaviour which had been *blameleſs, touching the righteouſneſs which is in the law* \*. He gave up his friends, his relations, and

*election* was not certain, but that he might fall from it again through the natural prevalence of bodily appetites, if not duly reſtrained by his own voluntary care. This ſingle paſſage is a full answer out of the mouth of St. *Paul* himſelf, to all the miſtakes that have been made of his meaning in ſome obſcure expreſſions concerning grace, election, and juſtification.

\* Phil. iii. 6.



family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life. He gave up that religion which he had profited in above many of his equals in his own nation, and those traditions of his fathers, which he had been more exceedingly zealous of\*. 'How hard this sacrifice was to a man of his warm temper, and above all men to a Jew, is worth consideration. That nation is known to have been more tenacious of their religious opinions than any other upon the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, under whose discipline St. Paul was bred. The departing therefore so suddenly from their favourite tenets, renouncing their pride, and from their disciple becoming their adversary, was a most difficult effort for one to make, so nursed up in the esteem of them, and whose early prejudices were so strongly confirmed by all the power of habit, all the authority of example, and all the allurements of honour and interest. These

\* Gal. i. 14.

were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian: let us now see what inconveniences he had to fear: the implacable vengeance of those he deserted; that sort of contempt which is hardest to bear, the contempt of those whose good opinion he had most eagerly sought; and all those other complicated evils which he describes in his 2d Epistle to the *Corinthians*, chap. xi. Evils, the least of which were enough to have frightened any impostor even from the most hopeful and profitable cheat. But where the advantage proposed bears no proportion to the dangers incurred, or the mischiefs endured, he must be absolutely out of his senses who will either engage in an imposture, or, being engaged, persevere.

Upon the whole then, I think I have proved that the desire of wealth, of fame, or of power, could be no motive to make *St. Paul* a convert to *Christ*; but that on the contrary he must have been checked by that desire, as well as by the just apprehension of many inevitable and insupportable evils, from taking a part so contradictory

dictory to his past life, to all the principles he had imbibed, all the habits he had contracted. It only remains to be enquired, whether the gratification of any other passion under the authority of that religion, or by the means it afforded, could be his inducement.

Now that there have been some impostors who have pretended to revelations from God, merely to give a loose to irregular passions, and set themselves free from all restraints of government, law, or morality, both ancient and modern history shews. But the doctrine preached by *St. Paul* is absolutely contrary to all such designs \*. His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behaviour, under the cloak of religion. We no-where read in his works that saints are above moral ordinances; that dominion or property is founded in grace; that there is

\* See particularly *Rom. xi. and xiii. and Col. iii.*

no difference in moral actions; that any impulses of the mind are to direct us against the light of our reason and the laws of nature; or any of those wicked tenets from which the peace of society has been disturbed, and the rules of morality have been broken by men pretending to act under the sanction of a divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his Conversion to Christianity, bear any mark of a libertine disposition. As among the *Jews*, so among the *Christians*, his conversation and manners were blameless. Hear the appeal that he makes to the *Thessalonians* upon his doctrine and behaviour among them: ‘Our exhortation was not of *deceit*,  
‘nor of *uncleanness*, nor in *guile*: ye are  
‘witnesses, and God also, how *holily*, and  
‘*justly*, and *unblameably* we behaved our-  
‘selves among you that believe.’ 1 *Thess.*  
ii. 10\*. † And to the *Corinthians* he says,  
We

\* See also 2 Cor. i. 12. and iv. 2.

† If St. *Paul* had held any secret doctrines, or *esoterick*,  
(as the philosophers call them) we should have probably  
found



*We have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.* 2. Cor. vii. 2.

It was not, then, the desire of gratifying any irregular passion that could induce St. Paul to turn *Christian*, any more than the hope of advancing himself either in wealth, or reputation, or power. But still it is possible, some men may say, (and I would leave no imaginable objection unanswered) that though St. Paul could have no selfish or interested view in undertaking such an imposture, yet for the sake of its moral doctrines he might be inclined to support the Christian faith, and make use of some

found them in the letters he wrote to *Timothy*, *Titus*, and *Philemon*, his bosom friends, and disciples. But the theological and moral doctrines are exactly the same in *them* as those he wrote to the *churches*. A very strong presumptive proof of his being no impostor! Surely had he been one, he would have given some hints in these private letters of the cheat they were carrying on, and some secret directions to turn it to some worldly purposes of one kind or another; but no such thing is to be found in any one of them. The same disinterested, holy, and divine spirit, breathes in all these, as in the other more public epistles.



pious frauds to advance a religion, which, though erroneous and false in its theological tenets, and in the facts upon which it was grounded, was in its precepts and influence beneficial to mankind.

Now it is true that some good men in the *beathen* world have both pretended to Divine revelations, and introduced or supported religions they knew to be false, under a notion of public utility: but besides that this practice was built upon maxims disclaimed by the *Jews*, (who looking upon truth, not utility, to be the basis of their religion, abhorred all, such frauds, and thought them injurious to the honour of God) the circumstances they acted in were very different from those of *St. Paul*.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized nations, had no other way to tame those barbarous people, and bring them to submit to order and government, but by the reverence which they acquired from this pretence. The fraud was therefore alike beneficial both to the deceiver and the deceived. And in all other instances which

can be given of good men acting this part, they not only did it to serve good ends, but were secure of its doing no harm. Thus when *Lycurgus* persuaded the *Spartans*, or *Numa* the *Romans*, that the laws of the one were inspired by *Apollo*, or those of the other by *Egeria*, when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles, or in augury, no temporal mischief either to them or their people could attend the reception of that belief. It drew on no persecutions, no enmity with the world. But at that time when *St. Paul* undertook the preaching of the Gospel to persuade any man to be a *Christian*, was to persuade him to expose himself to all the calumnies human nature could suffer. This *St. Paul* knew; this he not only expected, but warned those he taught to look for it too, 1 *Thess.* iii. 4. 2 *Cor.* vi. 4, 5. *Eph.* vi. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. *Phil.* i. 28, 29, 30. *Col.* i. 9, 10, 11. *Rom.* viii. 35, 36. The only support that he had himself, or gave to them, was, 'That if they suffered with *Christ*, they should be also glorified together.' And that 'he reckoned

' that the sufferings of the present time  
 ' were not worthy to be compared *with*  
 ' *that glory.*' *Rom. viii. 17, 18.* So like-  
 wise he writes to the *Thessalonians*, ' We  
 ' ourselves glory in you, in the churches  
 ' of God, for your patience and faith in  
 ' all your persecutions and tribulations that  
 ' you endure; which is a manifest token  
 ' of the righteous judgment of God, that  
 ' ye may be counted worthy of the king-  
 ' dom of God, *for which also ye suffer.* See-  
 ' ing it is a righteous thing with God to  
 ' recompense [or pay] tribulation to them  
 ' that trouble you; and to you who are  
 ' troubled, rest with us, *when the Lord*  
 ' *Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven, with*  
 ' *his mighty angels,*' &c. *2 Thess. i. 4, 5, 6,*  
 7. And to the *Corinthians* he says, ' *If in*  
 ' *this life only we have hope in Christ, we are*  
 ' *of all men the most miserable.*' How much  
 reason he had to say this, the hatred, the  
 contempt, the torments, the deaths endured  
 by the christians in that age, and long after-  
 wards, abundantly prove. Whoever pro-  
 fessed the Gospel under these circumstances,  
 without

without an entire conviction of its being a Divine revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad; he must have been the most hardened wretch that ever breathed. Could any man who had in his nature the least spark of humanity, subject his fellow-creatures to so many miseries; or could one that had in his mind the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false, merely for the sake of its moral doctrines? Such an extravagance is too absurd to be supposed; and I dwell too long on a notion that upon a little reflection confutes itself.

I would only add to the other proofs I have given, that St. *Paul* could have no rational motive to become a Disciple of *Christ*, unless he sincerely believed in him, this observation: that whereas it may be objected to the other Apostles, by those who are resolved not to credit their testimony, that having been deeply engaged with

*Jesus*



*Jesus* during his life, they were obliged to continue the same professions after his death; for the support of their own credit, and from having gone too far to go back, this can by no means be said of *St. Paul*. On the contrary, whatever force there may be in that way of reasoning, it all tends to convince us that *St. Paul* must naturally have continued a  *Jew*, and an enemy of *Christ Jesus*: if they were engaged on one side, he was as strongly engaged on the other. If shame withheld them from changing sides, much more ought it to have stop't him, who, being of a higher education and rank in life a great deal than they, had more credit to lose, and must be supposed to have been vastly more sensible to that sort of shame. The only difference was, that they, by quitting their master after his death, might have preserved themselves; whereas he, by quitting the *Jews*, and taking up the cross of *Christ*, certainly brought on his own destruction.

As therefore no rational motive appears for *St. Paul's* embracing the faith of *Christ*,  
without



without having been really convinced of the truth of it: but on the contrary, every thing concurred to deter him from acting that part; one might very justly conclude, that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in reality convinced of the truth of it, and that, by consequence, he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive.

But that no shadow of doubt may remain upon the impossibility of his having been such an impostor; that it may not be said, 'The minds of men are sometimes so capricious, that they will act without any rational motives, they knew not why, and so perhaps might St. Paul;' I shall next endeavour to prove, that if he had been so unaccountably wild and absurd, as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous, both to himself and those he deceived by it, he could not possibly have carried it on with any success, by the means that we know he employed.

First then let me observe, that if his conversion, and the part that he acted in consequence

sequence of it, was an imposture, it was such an imposture as could not be carried on by one man alone. The faith he professed, and which he became an Apostle of, was not his invention. He was not the author or beginner of it, and therefore it was not in his power to draw the doctrines of it out of his own imagination. With *Jesus*, who was the author and head of it, he had never had any communication before his death, nor with his Apostles after his death, except as their persecutor. As he took on himself the office and character of an Apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and perfect knowledge of all the facts contained in the Gospel, several of which had only passed between *Jesus* himself and his twelve Apostles, and others more privately still, so that they could be known but to very few, being not yet made publick by any writings; otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that Gospel with more knowledge than he; and as the testimony they bore would have been different.

different in point of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of Scripture repugnant to his, from their entire disagreement with those *Jewish* opinions in which he was bred up; either they must have been forced to ruin his credit, or he would have ruined theirs. Some general notices he might have gained of these matters from the christians he persecuted, but not exact nor extensive enough to qualify him for an Apostle, whom the least error in these points would have disgraced, and who must have been ruined by it in all his pretensions to that inspiration, from whence the apostolical authority was chiefly derived.

It was therefore impossible for him to act this part but in confederacy at least with the Apostles. Such a confederacy was still more necessary for him, as the undertaking to preach the Gospel did not only require an exact and particular knowledge of all it contained, but an apparent power of working miracles; for to such a power all the Apostles appealed in proof of their mission, and of the doctrines they preached. He  
was

was therefore to learn of them by what secret arts they so imposed on the senses of men, if this power was a cheat. But how could he gain these men to become his confederates? Was it by furiously persecuting them and their brethren, as we find that he did, to the very moment of his conversion? Would they venture to trust their capital enemy with all the secrets of their imposture, with those upon which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they put it in his power to take away not only their lives, but the honour of their sect, which they preferred to their lives, by so ill-placed a confidence? Would men, so secret as not to be drawn by the most severe persecutions to say one word which could convince them of being impostors, confess themselves such to their persecutor, in hopes of his being their accomplice? This is still more impossible than that he should attempt to engage in their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We suppose then, that till he came to *Damascus*, he had no communication with  
the



the Apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learnt nothing from them except the doctrines which they had publicly taught to all the world. When he came there, he told the *Jews*, to whom he brought letters from the high priest and the synagogue against the \* Christians, and his having seen in the way a great light from heaven, and heard *Christ Jesus* reproaching him with his persecution, and commanding him to go into the city, where it should be told him what he was to do. But to account for his chusing this method of declaring himself a convert to *Christ*, we must suppose that all those who were with him, when he pretended he had this vision, were his accomplices. Otherwise, the story he told could have gained no belief, being contradicted by them whose testimony was necessary to vouch for the truth of it. And yet, how can we suppose, that all these men should be willing to join in this imposture? They were pro-

\* The Disciples of *Christ* were not called Christians till after this time; but I use the name as most familiar to us, and to avoid circumlocutions.

bably officers of justice, or soldiers, who had been employed often before in executing the orders of the high priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or if they were chosen particularly for this expedition, they must have been chosen by them as men they could trust for their zeal in that cause. What should induce them to the betraying that business they were employed in? Does it even appear that they had any connection with the man they so lyed for, before or after this time, or any reward from him for it? This is therefore a difficulty in the first outset of this imposture not to be overcome.

But further, he was to be instructed by one at *Damascus*. That instructor therefore must have been his accomplice, though they appear to be absolute strangers to one another, and though he was a man of an excellent character, *who had a good report of all the Jews that dwell at Damascus*, and so was very unlikely to have engaged in such imposture. Notwithstanding these improbabilities, this man, I say, must have been his confident and accomplice in carrying

ing.

ing on this wicked fraud, and the whole matter must have been previously agreed on between them. But here again the same objection occurs: How could this man venture to act such a dangerous part without the consent of the other Disciples, especially of the Apostles, or by what means could he obtain their consent? And how absurdly did they contrive their business, to make the conversion of *Saul* the effect of a miracle, which all those who were with him must certify did never happen! How much easier would it have been to have made him be present at some pretended miracle wrought by the disciples, or by *Ananias* himself, when none were able to discover the fraud, and have imputed his conversion to that, or to the arguments used by some of his prisoners whom he might have discoursed with, and questioned about their faith, and the grounds of it, in order to colour his intended conversion?

As this was the safest, so it was the most natural method of bringing about such a change; instead of ascribing it to an event  
which

which lay so open to detection. For (to use the words of St. *Paul* to *Agrippa*) this *thing was not done in a corner* \*, but in the eye of the world, and subject immediately to the examination of those who would be most strict in searching into the truth of it, the *Jews* at *Damascus*. Had they been able to bring any shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture must have been nipt in the bud. Nor were they at *Jerusalem*, whose commission he bore, less concerned to discover so provoking a cheat. But we find that many years afterwards, when they had had all the time and means they could desire to make the strictest enquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to *Agrippa* † in the presence of *Festus*, upon his own knowledge of the truth of his story; who did not contradict him, though he had certainly heard all that the *Jews* could alledge against the credit of it in any particular. A very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact,

\* Acts xxvi. 26.

† Ibidem.



and the integrity of the man, who with so fearless a confidence could call upon a *king* to give testimony for him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.

But to return to *Ananias*. Is it not strange, if this story had been an imposture, and he had been joined with *Paul* in carrying it on, that after their meeting at *Damascus* we never should hear of their consorting together, or acting in concert, or that the former drew any benefit from the friendship of the latter, when he became so considerable among the Christians? Did *Ananias* engage and continue in such a dangerous fraud, without any hope or desire of private advantage? Or was it safe for *Paul* to shake him off, and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no other way to get over this difficulty, but by supposing that *Ananias* happened to die soon after the other's conversion. Let us then take that for granted, without any authority either of history or tradition, and let us see in what manner this wondrous imposture was carried on by *Paul* himself. His first care ought to have  
been,

been, to get himself owned, and received as an Apostle by the Apostles. Till this was done, the bottom he stood upon was very narrow, nor could he have any probable means of supporting himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Intruders into impostures run double risks; they are in danger of being detected, not only by those upon whom they attempt to practise their cheats, but also by those whose society they force themselves into, who must always be jealous of such an intrusion, and much more from one who had always before behaved as their enemy. Therefore to gain the Apostles, and bring them to admit him into a participation of all their mysteries, all their designs, and all their authority, was absolutely necessary at this time to *Paul*. The least delay was of dangerous consequence, and might expose him to such inconveniences as he never afterwards could overcome\*. But instead of attending to this necessity, he went into *Arabia*, and

\* Gal. i. 17, 18.

then

then returned again to *Damascus*; nor did he go to *Jerusalem* till three years were past.

Now this conduct may be accounted for, if it be true that (as he declares in his epistle to the *Galatians* \*) ' he neither received the Gospel of any man, neither ' was he taught it, but by the revelation of ' *Jesus Christ*.' Under such a master, and with the assistance of his divine power, he might go on boldly without any human associates; but an impostor, so left to himself, so deprived of all hope, all support, all recommendation, could not have succeeded.

Further; we find that at *Antioch* he was not afraid to withstand Peter to his face, and even to reprove him before all the Disciples, because he was to be blamed †. If he was an impostor, how could he venture to offend that Apostle, whom it so highly concerned him to agree with, and please? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to shew greater regards to each other; such freedom belongs to truth alone.

\* Gal. i. 12.

† Gal. ii. 11, 14.

But let us consider what difficulties he had to encounter among the *Gentiles* themselves, in the enterprize he undertook of going to *Them*, making himself *their Apostle*, and converting *Them* to the religion of *Christ*. As this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolical functions, that which, in the language of his Epistles, he was particularly *called to*; or which, to speak like an unbeliever, he chose and assigned to himself, it deserves a particular consideration: but I shall only touch the principal points of it as concisely as I can, because you have in a great measure exhausted the subject in your late excellent book on the resurrection, where you discourse with such strength of reason and eloquence upon the difficulties that opposed the propagation of the Christian religion in all parts of the world.

Now in this enterprize St. *Paul* was to contend, 1<sup>st</sup>, With the policy and power of the magistrates; 2<sup>dly</sup>, With the interest, credit, and craft of the priests; 3<sup>dly</sup>, With the prejudices and passions of the people; 4<sup>thly</sup>,



4<sup>thly</sup>, With the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in all heathen countries the established religion was interwoven with their civil constitution, and supported by the magistrates as an essential part of the government, whoever has any acquaintance with antiquity cannot but know. They tolerated indeed many different worships, (though not with so entire a latitude as some people suppose) as they suffered men to discourse very freely concerning religion, provided they would submit to an exterior conformity with the established rites; nay, according to the genius of paganism, which allowed an intercommunity of worship, they in most places admitted, without any great difficulty, new gods and new rites; but they no where endured any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition made to it, esteeming that an unpardonable offence, not to the gods alone, but to the state. This was so universal a notion, and so constant a maxim of heathen policy, that when the Christian religion set

itself up in opposition to all other religions, admitted no intercommunity with them, but declared that the gods of the Gentiles *were not to be worshipped*, nor any society suffered between them and the *only true God*; when this new doctrine began to be propagated, and made such a progress as to fall under the notice of the magistrate, the civil power was every way armed with all its terrors against it. When therefore *St. Paul* undertook the conversion of the *Gentiles*, he knew very well, that the most severe persecutions must be the consequence of any success in his design.

*Secondly*, This danger was rendered more certain by the opposition he was to expect from the interest, credit, and craft of the priests. How gainful a trade they, with all their inferior dependents, made of those superstitions which he proposed to destroy; how much credit they had with the people as well as the state by the means of them, and how much craft they employed in carrying on their impostures, all history shews. *St. Paul* could not doubt that all these men  
would

would exert their utmost abilities to stop the spreading of the doctrines he preached; doctrines which struck at the root of their power and gain, and were much more terrible to them than those of the most atheistical sect of philosophers, because the latter contented themselves with denying their principles, but at the same time declared for supporting their practices, as useful cheats, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments authorized by the sanction of law. Whatever therefore their cunning could do to support their own worship, whatever aid they could draw from the magistrate, whatever zeal they could raise in the people, *St. Paul* was to contend with, unsupported by any human assistance.

And *Thirdly*, This he was to do in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of the people. Now had he confined his preaching to *Judea* alone, this difficulty would not have occurred in near so great a degree. The people there were so moved by the miracles the Apostles had wrought, as well as by the memory of those done by

*Jesus*, that in spite of their rulers, they began to be favourably disposed towards them; and we even find that the high priest \* and the council had more than once been with-held from treating the Apostles with so much severity as they desired to do, *for fear of the people*. But in the people among the *Gentiles* no such Dispositions could be expected: their prejudices were violent, not only in favour of their own superstitions, but in a particular manner against any doctrines taught by a *Jew*. As, from their aversion to all idolatry, and irreconcilable separation from all other religions, the *Jews* were accused of hating mankind, so were they hated by all other nations: nor were they hated alone, but despised. To what a degree that contempt was carried, appears as well by the mention made of them in *heathen* authors, as by the complaints *Josephus* makes of the unreasonableness and injustice of it in his apology. What authority then could *St. Paul* flatter himself

\* Acts iv. 21. and v. 26.



that his preaching would carry along with it, among people to whom he was at once both the object of national hatred and national scorn? But, besides this popular prejudice against a *Jew*, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most ingrafted religious opinions. They agreed to no principles of which he could avail himself, to procure their assent to the other parts of the Gospel he preached. To convert the *Jews* to *Christ Jesus*, he was able to argue from their own scriptures, upon the authority of books which they owned to contain Divine Revelations, and from which he could clearly convince them, that *Jesus was the very Christ*. But all these ideas were new to the *Gentiles*; they expected no *Christ*\*, they allowed no such scriptures, they were to be taught the *Old Testament* as well as the *New*. How was this to be done by a man not even authorized by his own nation: opposed by those who were greatest, and thought wisest

\* Acts ix. 22.

among them; either quite single, or only attended by one or two more under the same disadvantages, and even of less consideration than he?"

The light of nature \* indeed, without express revelation, might have conducted the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God the creator of all things, and to that light St. Paul might appeal, as we find that he did †. But clear as it was, they had almost put it out by their superstitions, *having changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and serving the creature more than the Creator.* And to this idolatry they were strongly attached, not by their prejudices alone, but by their passions, which were flattered and gratified in it, as they believed that their deities would be rendered propitious, not by virtue and holiness, but by offerings, and incense, and outward rites; rites which dazzled their senses by magnificent shews,

\* Acts xiv. 17. xvii. 17, 28.      † Rom. i. 23, 25.

and

and allured them by pleasures often of a very impure and immoral nature. Instead of all this, the Gospel proposed to them no other terms of acceptance with God but a worship of him *in spirit and truth*, sincere repentance, and perfect submission to the Divine laws, the strictest purity of life and manners, and renouncing of all those lusts in which they had formerly walked. How unpalatable a doctrine was this to men so given up to the power of those lusts, as the whole heathen world was at that time! If their philosophers could be brought to approve it, there could be no hope that the people would relish it, or exchange the ease and indulgence which those religions they were bred up in allowed to their appetites, for one so harsh and severe. But might not St. *Paul*, in order to gain them, relax that severity? He might have done so, no doubt, and probably would, if he had been an impostor; but it appears by all his epistles, that he preached it as purely, and enjoined it as strongly, as *Jesus* himself.

But supposing they might be persuaded to quit their habitual sensuality for the purity of the Gospel, and to forsake their idolatries, which St. Paul\* reckons amongst *the works of the flesh*, for the *spiritual* worship of the *one invisible God*, how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of the Salvation of man by the cross of *Jesus Christ*? Could they, who were bred in notions so contrary to that *great mystery*, to that *hidden wisdom of God*, which none of the princes of this world knew †, incline to receive it against the instructions of all their teachers, and the example of all their superiors? Could they whose Gods had almost all been powerful kings, and mighty conquerors, they who at that very time paid divine honours to the Emperors of Rome, whose only title to Deification was the imperial power; could they, I say, reconcile their ideas to a crucified Son of God, to a Redeemer of mankind on the cross? Would they look there for him *who is the image of the in-*

\* Gal. v. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. i. 7, 8.

*visible*



visible God, the first-born of every creature : by whom and for whom were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers\* ? Now, most surely, the natural man, (to speak in the words of St. Paul) received not these things, for they are foolishness to him ; neither could he know them, because they are spiritually discerned†. I may therefore conclude, that in the enterprize of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul was to contend not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests ; but also with the prejudices and passions of the people.

I am next to shew, that he was to expect no less opposition from the wisdom and pride of the philosophers. And though some may imagine, that men who pretend to be raised and refined, above vulgar prejudices and vulgar passions, would have been helpful to him in his designs, it will

\* Coloss. i. 15, 16.

† 1 Cor. ii. 14.

be found upon examination, that instead of assisting or befriending the Gospel, they were its worst and most irreconcilable enemies. For they had prejudices of their own still more repugnant to the doctrines of *Christ* than those of the vulgar, more deeply rooted, and more obstinately fixed in their minds. The wisdom upon which they valued themselves, chiefly consisted in vain metaphysical speculations, in logical subtleties, in endless disputes, in high-flown conceits of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, in dogmatical positiveness about doubtful opinions, or sceptical doubts about the most clear and certain truths. It must appear at first sight, that nothing could be more contradictory to the first principles of the Christian religion, than those of the Atheistical or Sceptical sects, which at that time prevailed very much, both among the *Greeks* and the *Romans*; nor shall we find that the Theistical sects were much less at enmity with it, when we consider the doctrines they held upon the nature of God and the soul.

But

But I will not enlarge on a subject \* which the most learned Mr. *Warburton* has handled so well. If it were necessary to enter particularly into this argument, I could easily prove, that there was not one of all the different philosophical sects then upon earth, not even the *Platonicks* themselves, who are thought to favour it most, that did not maintain some opinions fundamentally contrary to those of the Gospel. And in this they all agreed, to explode as most unphilosophical, and contrary to every notion that any among them maintained, that great article of the Christian religion, upon which the foundations of it are laid, and without which St. *Paul* declares to his profelytes, *their faith would be vain* †, the resurrection of the dead with their bodies, of which resurrection *Christ* was the *first-born* ‡. Besides the contrariety of their

\* See the divine legation of *Moses*, l. iii. See also a late pamphlet, entitled, A Critical Enquiry into the Opinions and Practice of the ancient Philosophers, concerning the Nature of the Soul, and a future State.

† 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20.

‡ Col. i. 18.

tenets to those of the Gospel, the pride that was common to all the philosophers, was of itself an almost invincible obstacle against the admission of the evangelical doctrines, calculated to humble that pride, and teach them that *professing themselves to be wise they became fools* \*. This pride was no less intractable, no less averse to the instructions of *Christ*, or of his Apostles, than that of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*. *St. Paul* was therefore to contend in his enterprize of converting the *Gentiles*, with all the opposition that could be made to it by all the different sects of philosophers. And how formidable an opposition this was, let those consider who are acquainted from history with the great credit those sects had obtained at that time in the world; a credit even superior to that of the priests. Whoever pretended to learning or virtue was their Disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, kings, ranged themselves under their

\* Rom. i. 22.

discipline,



discipline, were trained up in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these sects made it a maxim, not to disturb the popular worship, or established religion; but under those limitations they taught very freely whatever they pleased, and no religious opinions were more warmly supported, than those they delivered were by their followers. The Christian religion at once overturned their several systems, taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it upon higher and much stronger foundations, mortified their pride, confounded their learning, discovered their ignorance, ruined their credit. Against such an enemy what would they not do? Would they not exert the whole power of their rhetorick, the whole art of their logick, their influence over the people, their interest with the great, to discredit a novelty so alarming to them all? If *St. Paul* had had nothing to trust to but his own natural faculties, his own understanding, knowledge, and eloquence, could he have hoped to be singly a match for all theirs united against him?

him? Could a teacher, unheard of before, from an obscure and unlearned part of the world, have withstood the authority of *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Epicurus*, *Zeno*, *Arcefilaus*, *Carneades*, and all the great names which held the first rank of human wisdom? He might as well have attempted alone, or with the help of *Barnabas* and *Silas*, of *Timotheus* and *Titus*, to have erected a monarchy upon the ruins of all the several states then in the world, as to have erected Christianity upon the destruction of all the several sects of philosophy which reigned in the minds of the *Gentiles*, among whom he preached, particularly the *Greeks* and the *Romans*.

Having thus proved (as I think) that in the work of converting the *Gentiles*, *St. Paul* could have no assistance, but was sure on the contrary of the utmost repugnance and opposition to it imaginable, from the magistrates, from the priests, from the people, and from the philosophers; it necessarily follows, that to succeed in that work he must have called in some extraordinary aid, some stronger power than that of reason  
and

and argument. Accordingly we find, he tells the *Corinthians*, that his speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power. 1 Cor. ii. 4. And to the *Thessalians*, he says, Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost. 1 Theff. i. 5. It was to the efficacy of the Divine power that he ascribed all his success in those countries, and wherever else he planted the Gospel of Christ. If that power really went with him, it would enable him to overcome all those difficulties that obstructed his enterprize, but *then he was not an impostor*: our enquiry therefore must be, whether (supposing him to have been an impostor) he could, by *pretending to miracles*, have overcome all those difficulties, and carried on his work with success.

Now to give miracles, falsely pretended to, any reputation, two circumstances are principally necessary, *an apt disposition* in those whom they are designed to impose upon, and a *powerful confederacy* to carry  
on,

on, and abet the cheat. Both these circumstances, or at least one of them, have always accompanied all the false miracles, ancient and modern, which have obtained any credit among mankind. To both these was owing the general faith of the heathen world in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other impostures, by which the priests, combined with the magistrates, supported the national worship, and deluded a people prepossessed in their favour, and willing to be deceived. Both the same causes likewise co-operate in the belief that is given to Popish miracles among those of their own church. But neither of these assisted *St. Paul*. What prepossessions could there have been in the minds of the *Gentiles*, either in favour of him, or the doctrines he taught? or rather, what prepossessions could be stronger than those, which they undoubtedly had against both? If he had remained in *Judea*, it might have been suggested by unbelievers, that the *Jews* were a credulous people, apt to seek after miracles, and to afford them an easy belief; and that the



the fame of those said to be done by *Jesus* himself, and by his Apostles, before *Paul* declared his conversion, had predisposed their minds, and warmed their imaginations to the admission of others supposed to be wrought by the same power.

The signal miracle of the Apostles speaking with tongues on the day of *Pentecost*\*, had made three thousand converts; that of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, five thousand more. Nay such was the faith of the multitude, that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, *that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.* Acts v. 15. Here was therefore a good foundation laid for *Paul* to proceed upon in pretending to similar miraculous works; though the priests and the rulers were hardened against them, the people were inclined to give credit to them, and there was reason to hope for success among *them* both at *Jerusalem* and in all

\* Acts ii. 14. iv. 4.

the regions belonging to the *Jews*. But no such dispositions were to be found in the *Gentiles*. There was among them no matter prepared for imposture to work upon, no knowledge of *Christ*, no thought of his power, or of the power of those who came in his name. Thus when, at *Lystra* \*, *St. Paul* healed the man who was a cripple from his birth, so far were the people there from supposing that he could be able to do such a thing as an *Apostle of Christ*, or by any virtue derived from him, that they took *Paul* and *Barnabas* to be gods of their own, come down in the likeness of men, and would have sacrificed to them as such.

Now I ask, Did the citizens of *Lystra* concur in this matter to the deceiving themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any conceits of a miraculous power belonging to *Paul*, which could dispose them to think he worked such a miracle when he did not? As the contrary is evident, so in all other places to which he

\* Acts xiv.

carried the Gospel, it may be proved to demonstration, that he could find no disposition, no aptness, no bias to aid his imposture, if the miracles, by which he every where confirmed his preaching, had not been true.

On the other hand let us examine, whether without the advantage of such an assistance there was any *confederacy* strong enough to impose his false miracles upon the *Gentiles*, who were both unprepared and undispensed to receive them. The contrary is apparent. He was in no combination with their *priests* or their *magistrates*; no *sect* or *party* among them gave him any help; all eyes were open and watchful to detect his impostures, all hands ready to punish him as soon as detected. Had he remained in *Judea*, he would at least have had many confederates, all the Apostles, all the Disciples of *Christ*, at that time pretty numerous; but in preaching to the *Gentiles* he was often alone, never with more than two or three companions or followers. Was this a confederacy powerful enough to carry  
on

on such a cheat, in so many different parts of the world, against the united opposition of the magistrates, priests, philosophers, people, all combined to detect and expose their frauds?

Let it be also considered, that those upon whom they practised these arts were not a gross or ignorant people, apt to mistake any uncommon operations of nature, or juggling tricks, for miraculous acts. The churches planted by *St. Paul* were in the most enlightened parts of the world, among the *Greeks of Asia and Europe*, among the *Romans*, in the midst of science, philosophy, freedom of thought, and in an age more inquisitively curious into the powers of nature, and less inclined to credit religious frauds, than any before it. Nor were they only the lowest of the people that he converted. *Sergius Paulus*, the proconsul of *Paphos*, *Eraustus*\*, *Chamberlain* of *Corinth*, and *Dionysius* the *Arcopagite*, were his proselytes.

\* εἰκονέ, μὸς τῆς πόλεως, treasurer or bailiff of the city.



Upon the whole it appears beyond contradiction, that his pretension to miracles was not assisted by the *disposition* of those whom he designed to convert by those means, nor by any powerful *confederacy* to carry on, and abet the cheat, without both which concurring circumstances, or one at least, no such pretension was ever supported with any success.

Both these circumstances concurred even in the late famous miracles supposed to be done at *Abbé Paris's* tomb. They had not indeed the support of the government, and for that reason appear to deserve more attention than other popish miracles; but they were supported by all the *Jansenists*, a very powerful and numerous party in *France*, made up partly of wise and able men, partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All these confederated together to give credit to miracles, said to be worked in behalf of their party, and those who believed them were strongly disposed to that belief. And yet with these advantages how easily were they suppressed! Only by walling up that part of the church,  
where

where the tomb of the Saint, who was supposed to work them, was placed! Soon after this was done, a paper was fixed on the wall with this inscription:

*De par le roy defense à Dieu  
De faire miracle en ce lieu.*

*By command of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles here.* The pasquinade was a witty one, but the event turned the point of it against the party by which it was made: for if God had really worked any miracles there, could this absurd prohibition have taken effect? Would he have suffered his purpose to be defeated by building a wall? When all the Apostles were shut up in prison to hinder their working of miracles\*, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and let them out. But the power of *Ablé Paris* could neither throw down the wall that excluded his votaries, nor operate through that impediment. And yet his miracles are often compared with,

\* Acts v. 16. & sequentes, to the 26th.

and opposed by unbelievers to, those of *Christ* and his Apostles, which is the reason of my having taken this particular notice of them here. But to go back to the times nearer to St. *Paul*'s. There is in *Lucian* an account of a very extraordinary and successful imposture carried on in his days, by one *Alexander*\* of Pontus, who introduced a new god into that country, whose prophet he called himself, and in whose name he pretended to miracles, and delivered oracles, by which he acquired great wealth and power. All the arts by which this cheat was managed are laid open by *Lucian*, and nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of this man and St. *Paul*. *Alexander* made no alteration in the religion established in *Pontus* before; he only grafted his own upon it; and spared no pains to interest in the success of it the whole *heathen* priesthood, not only in *Pontus*, but all over the world†; sending great num-

\* Vide the *Pseudomantis* of *Lucian*.

† *Pseudom.* *Lucian.* *Varior.* p. 765, 766.

bers of those who came to consult him to other oracles, that were at that time in the highest vogue; by which means he engaged them all to support the reputation of his, and abet his imposture \*. He spoke with the greatest respect of all the sects of philosophers, except the *Epicureans*, who from their principles he was sure would deride and oppose his fraud; for though they presumed not to innovate, and overturn established religions, yet they very freely attacked and exposed all innovations that were introduced under the name of religion, and had not the authority of a legal establishment. To get the better of their opposition, as well as that of the Christians †, he called in the aid of persecution and force ‡, exciting the people against them, and answering objections with stones. That he might be sure to get money enough, he delivered this oracle in the name of his God §, *I command you to grace with gifts*

\* Ibid. 763. † Ibid. 762, 763, 773, 777.

‡ Ibid. 762, 768, 773, 774.

§ *Muneribus decorate meum vatem atque ministrum præcipio—nec opum mihi cura, at maxima vatis.*



*my prophet and minister; for I have no regard for riches myself, but the greatest for my prophet.* And he shared the gains that he made, which were immense, among an infinite number of associates and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his fraud. When any declared themselves to be his enemies, against whom he durst not proceed by open force, he endeavoured to gain them by blandishments, and having got them into his power, to destroy them by secret ways\*; which arts he practised against *Lucian* himself. Others he kept in awe and dependence upon him, by detaining in his own hands the written questions they had proposed to his God upon state affairs; and as these generally came from men of the greatest power and rank, his being possessed of them was of infinite service to him, and made him master of all their credit†, and of no little part of their wealth.

\* Ibid. 776, 780, 781.

† Ibid. 767.

He obtained the protection and friendship of *Rutilianus* \*, a great *Roman* general, by flattering him with promises of a very long life, and exaltation to *Deity* after his death; and at last having quite turned his head, enjoined him by an oracle to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have had by the *moon*; which command *Rutilianus* obeyed †, and by his alliance secured this impostor from any danger of punishment; the *Roman* governor of *Bythinia* and *Pontus* excusing himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when *Lucian* ‡ and several others offered themselves to be his accusers.

He never quitted that ignorant and barbarous country, which he had made choice of at first as the fittest to play his tricks in undiscovered; but, residing himself among those superstitious and credulous people, extended his fame to a great distance by the emissaries which he employed all over the world, especially at *Rome* §, who did not pretend themselves to work any miracles,

\* Ibid. 768.

† Ibid. 781.

‡ Ibid. 753.

§ Ibid. 762, 769.

but

but only promulgated his, and gave him intelligence of all that it was useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was conducted, every one of which is directly opposite to all those used by *St. Paul* in preaching the Gospel; and yet such methods alone could give success to a cheat of this kind. I will not mention the many debaucheries, and wicked enormities committed by this false prophet under the mask of religion, which is another characteristical difference between him and *St. Paul*; nor the ambiguous answers, cunning evasions, and juggling artifices which he made use of; in all which it is easy to see the evident marks of an imposture, as well as in the objects he plainly appears to have had in view. That which I chiefly insist upon, is the strong confederacy with which he took care to support his pretension to miraculous powers, and the apt disposition in those he imposed upon to concur and assist in deceiving themselves; advantages

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tages entirely wanting to the Apostles of *Christ*.

From all this I think it may be concluded, that no human means employed by *St. Paul*, in his design of converting the Gentiles, were or could be adequate to the great difficulties he had to contend with, or to the success that we know attended his work; and we can in reason ascribe that success to no other cause, but the power of God going along with and aiding his ministry, because no other was equal to the effect.

Having then shewn that *St. Paul* had *no rational motives* to become an Apostle of *Christ*, without being himself convinced of the truth of that Gospel he preached; and that, had he engaged in such an imposture without any rational motives, he would have had *no possible means* to carry it on with any success; having also brought reasons of a very strong nature, to make it appear, that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the Gospel was an effect of the Divine power attending his ministry, I might rest all my proof of the Christian religion being  
a Divine



a Divine Revelation, upon the arguments drawn from this head alone. But, to consider this subject in all possible lights, I shall pursue the proposition which I set out with through each of its several parts; and having proved, as I hope, to the conviction of any impartial man, that St. *Paul* was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; I come next to consider whether he was an *enthusiast*, who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed upon himself.

Now these are the ingredients of which *enthusiasm* is generally composed: great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self-conceit. That the first of these qualities was in St. *Paul*, may be concluded from that fervour of zeal with which he acted both as a *Jew* and *Christian*, in maintaining that which he thought to be right; and hence, I suppose, as well as from the impossibility of his having been an impostor, some unbelievers have chose to consider him as an enthusiast. But this quality alone will not be sufficient to prove

him to have been so, in the opinion of any reasonable man. The same temper has been common to others, who undoubtedly were not enthusiasts, to the *Gracchi*, to *Cato*, to *Brutus*, to many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this disposition had such a mastery over the mind of *St. Paul*, that he was not able at all times to rule and controul it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary, he was so much the master of it, as, in matters of an indifferent nature, to *become all things to all men*\*, bending his notions and manners to theirs, so far as his duty to God would permit, with the most pliant condescension; a conduct neither compatible with the stiffness of a bigot, nor the violent impulses of fanatic delusions. His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behaviour to *Agrippa*, *Festus*, and *Felix*; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.

\* 1 Cor. ix. 20, 21, 22.

Let us now see if any one of those other qualities which I have laid down, as disposing the mind to enthusiasm, and as being characteristical of it, belong to St. *Paul*. First, as to melancholy, which of all dispositions of body or mind is most prone to enthusiasm\*, it neither appears by his writings, nor by any thing told of him in the Acts of the Apostles, nor by any other evidence, that St. *Paul* was inclined to it more than other men. Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the Church of Christ, we read of no gloomy penances, no extravagant mortifications, such as the *Bramins*, the *Jaugues*, the monks of *La Trape*, and other melancholy enthusiasts, inflict on themselves. His holiness only consisted in the simplicity of a good life, and the unwearied performance of those apostolical duties to which he was called. The sufferings he met with on that account he chearfully bore, and even rejoiced in them for the love of *Jesus Christ*,

\* Josephus cont. Apion, l. ii. c. 37.

but he brought none on himself; we find, on the contrary, that he pleaded the privilege of a *Roman Citizen* to avoid being whipped. I could mention more instances of his having used the best methods that prudence could suggest, to escape danger and shun persecution, whenever it could be done without betraying the duty of his office, or the honour of God \*.

Compare

\* A remarkable instance of this appears in his conduct among the *Athenians* \*. There was at *Athens* a law, which made it capital to introduce or teach any new gods in their state. Therefore when *Paul* was preaching *Jesus and the resurrection* to the *Athenians*, some of them carried him before the court of *Areopagus*, the ordinary judges of criminal matters, and in a particular manner entrusted with the care of religion, as having broken this law, and being a *setter forth of strange gods*. Now in this case an impostor would have retracted his doctrine to save his life, and an enthusiast would have lost his life without trying to save it by innocent means. *St. Paul* did neither the one nor the other; he availed himself of an altar which he had found in the city, inscribed *To the Unknown God*, and pleaded that he did not propose to them the worship of any new god, but only explained to them one whom their government had

\* *Acts* xvii. and *Josephus* cont. *Apion*, l. ii. c. 37.

already



Compare with this the conduct of *Francis of Assisi*, or *Ignatius Loyola*, and other enthusiasts fainted by *Rome*, it will be found the reverse of *St. Paul's*. 'He wished in-  
' deed to die, and be with Christ,' but such a wish is no proof of melancholy, or enthusiasm; it only proves his conviction of the Divine truths he preached, and of the happiness laid up for him in those blessed abodes which had been shewn to him even in this life. Upon the whole, neither in his actions, nor in the instructions he gave to those under his charge, is there any tincture of melancholy, which yet is so essential a characteristick of enthusiasm, that I have scarce ever heard of any enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

already received; *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.* By this he avoided the law, and escaped being condemned by the *Areopagus*, without departing in the least from the truth of the Gospel, or violating the honour of God. An admirable proof, in my opinion, of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shews there was no mixture of fanaticism in his religion.

As to ignorance, which is another ground of enthusiasm, *St. Paul* was so far from it, that he appears to have been master not of the *Jewish* learning alone, but of the *Greek*. And this is one reason why he is less liable to the imputation of having been an enthusiast than the other Apostles, though none of them were such any more than he, as may by other arguments be invincibly proved.

I have mentioned credulity as another characteristick and cause of enthusiasm, which that it was not in *St. Paul*, the history of his life undeniably shews. For, on the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard of belief in the extremest degree, having paid no regard to all the miracles done by our Saviour, the same of which he could not be a stranger to, as he lived in *Jerusalem*, nor to that signal one done after his resurrection, and in his name \*, by *Peter* and *John*, upon the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple; nor to the evidence

\* Acts iii.

given in consequence of it by *Peter*, in presence of the high-priest \*, the rulers, elders, and scribes, that *Christ was raised from the dead*. He must also have known, that when all the *Apostles* had been shut up in the common prison, and the high-priest, the council, and all the senate of the children of Israel had sent their officers to bring them before them, the officers came and found them not in prison, but returned and made this report: 'The  
' prison truly found we shut with all safety,  
' and the keepers standing without before the  
' doors, but when we had opened we found  
' no man within.' And that the council was immediately told, that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people. And that being brought from thence before the council, they had spoke these memorable words, *We ought to obey God rather than men*. The God of our fathers raised up *Jesus*, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour,

\* Acts v. 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32.

for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him\*. All this he resisted, and was consenting to the murder of *Stephen*, who preached the same thing, and evidenced it by miracles. So that his mind, far from being disposed to a credulous faith, or a too easy reception of any miracle worked in proof of the Christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by the most obstinate prejudices, as much as any man's could possibly be; and from hence we may fairly conclude, that nothing less than the irresistible evidence of *his own senses*, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

Vanity or self-conceit is another circumstance that for the most part prevails in the character of an enthusiast. It leads men of a warm temper and religious turn, to think themselves worthy of the special regard, and extraordinary favours of God; and the

\* Acts viii. 1.



breath of that inspiration to which they pretend, is often no more than the wind of this vanity, which puffs them up to such extravagant imaginations. This strongly appears in the writings and lives of some enthusiastical hereticks, in the mysticks both ancient and modern, in many founders of orders and saints both male and female amongst the Papists, in several Protestant sectaries of the last age, and even in some of the *Methodists* now \*. All the Divine communications, illuminations, and extasies, to which they have pretended, evidently sprung from much self-conceit, working together with the vapours of melancholy upon a warm imagination; and this is one reason, besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear, that makes enthusiasm so very catching among weak minds. Such are most

\* See the account of *Montanus* and his followers, the writings of the counterfeit *Dionysius the Areopagite*, *Santa Theresa*, *St. Catharine of Sienna*, *Madame Bourignon*, the lives of *St. Francis of Assisi*, and *Ignatius Loyola*; see also an account of the lives of *George Fox* and of *Rice Evans*, and *Whitefield's Journal*.

strongly

strongly disposed to vanity; and, when they see others pretend to extraordinary gifts, are apt to flatter themselves that they may partake of them as well as those whose merit they think no more than their own. Vanity therefore may justly be deemed a principal source of enthusiasm. But that *St. Paul* was as free from it as any man, I think may be gathered from all that we see in his writings, or know of his life. Throughout his *Epistles* there is not one word that favours of vanity, nor is any action recorded of him, in which the least mark of it appears.

In his *Epistle to the Ephesians* he calls himself *less than the least of all saints* \*. And to the *Corinthians* he says, *he is the least of the Apostles, and not meet to be called an Apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God* †. In his *Epistle to Timothy* he says,  
 ‘ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of  
 ‘ all acceptation, That *Christ Jesus* came into  
 ‘ the world to save sinners, of whom I am

\* Eph. iii. 8.

† 1 Cor. xv. 9.

‘ chief.

‘ chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained  
 ‘ mercy, that in me first *Jesus Christ* might  
 ‘ shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern  
 ‘ to them which should hereafter believe in  
 ‘ him to life everlasting \*.’

It is true indeed, that in another epistle he tells the *Corinthians*, *That he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles*, 2 Cor. xi. 5. But the occasion which drew from him these words must be considered. A false teacher by faction and calumny had brought his apostleship to be in question among the *Corinthians*. Against such an attack not to have asserted his apostolical dignity, would have been a betraying of the office and duty committed to him by God. He was therefore constrained to do himself justice, and not let down that character, upon the authority of which the whole success and efficacy of his ministry among them depended. But how did he do it? Not with that wantonness which a vain man indulges, when he can get any opportunity of

\* 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

commending himself; not with a pompous detail of all the amazing miracles which he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had so fair an occasion of doing it, but with a modest and simple exposition of his abundant labours and sufferings in preaching the Gospel, and barely reminding them, 'that the signs of an apostle had been wrought *among them* in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds \*.' Could he say less than this? Is not such boasting *humility itself*? And yet for this he makes many apologies, expressing the greatest uneasiness in being obliged to speak thus of himself, even in his own vindication †. When, in the same epistle, and for the same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly does he do it! Not in his own name, but in the third person, *I knew a man in Christ, &c. caught up into the third heaven ‡*. And immediately after he adds, *but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he*

\* 2 Cor. xii. 12.

† 2 Cor. xi. 1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 30.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 2.



*seeth me to be, or that he beareth of me\**. How contrary is this to a spirit of vanity! how different from the practice of enthusiastick pretenders to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell long enough upon those subjects, but fill whole volumes with their accounts of them! Yet St. Paul is not satisfied with this forbearance; he adds the confession of some *infirmity*, which he tells the *Corinthians* was given to him as an alloy, *that he might not be above measure exalted through the abundance of his revelations* †. I would also observe, that he says this rapture or vision of paradise happened to him above fourteen years before. Now had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that in so long a period of time, he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? Would not his imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven, as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St. Catharine ‡ were carried by theirs? And if vanity had

\* 2 Cor. xii. 6.

† 2 Cor. xii. 7.

‡ See their works and lives.

been

been predominant in him, would he have remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the Divine favour? No, we should certainly have seen his epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with *Christ*, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all that we read in the works of those fainted enthusiasts, whom I have mentioned before. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teacher who had disputed his Apostolical power, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all \*. Nor does he take any merit to himself, even from the success of those Apostolical labours which he principally boasts of in this epistle. For in a former one to the same church he writes thus, ‘ Who then is ‘ *Paul*, and who is *Apollos*, but ministers ‘ by whom ye believed, even as the Lord ‘ gave to every man? I have planted,

\* 2 Cor. xii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11.

‘ *Apollos*

‘ *Apollos* watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth *any thing*, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.’ And in another place of the same Epistle he says, ‘ By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me\*.’

I think it needless to give more instances of the modesty of St. Paul. Certain I am, not one can be given that bears any colour of vanity, or that vanity in particular, which so strongly appears in all enthusiasts, of setting their imaginary gifts above those virtues which make the essence of true religion, and the real excellency of a good man, or, in the scripture phrase, of a *saint*. In his first epistle to the *Corinthians* he has these words, ‘ though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass

\* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

' or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have  
 ' the gift of prophecy, and understand all  
 ' mysteries and all knowledge, and though  
 ' I have all faith so that I could remove  
 ' mountains, and have no charity, I am  
 ' nothing. And though I bestow all my  
 ' goods to feed the poor, and though I give  
 ' my body to be burned, and have not  
 ' charity, it profiteth me nothing\*.' Is  
 this the language of enthusiasm? Did ever  
 enthusiast prefer that universal benevolence  
 which comprehends all moral virtues, and  
 which (as appears by the following verses)  
 is meant by charity here; did ever enthu-  
 siast, I say, prefer that benevolence to *faith*  
 and to miracles, to those religious opinions  
 which he had embraced, and to those su-  
 pernatural graces and gifts which he ima-  
 gined he had acquired, nay even to the  
 merit of martyrdom? Is it not the genius of  
 enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely  
 below the merit of faith, and of all moral  
 virtues to value that least which is most

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3, 4.



particularly enforced by *St. Paul*, a spirit of 'candour, moderation and peace? Certainly neither the temper, nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatick delusions, are to be found in this passage; but it may be justly concluded, that he who could esteem the value of charity so much above miraculous gifts, could not have pretended to any such gifts if he had them not in reality.

Since then it is manifest from the foregoing examination, that in *St. Paul's* disposition and character those qualities do not occur which seem necessary to form an enthusiast, it must be reasonable to conclude he was none. But allowing, for argument's sake, that all those qualities were to be found in him, or that the heat of his temper alone could be a sufficient foundation to support such a suspicion; I shall endeavour to prove, that he could not have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either in regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his *Epistles*.

The

The power of imagination in enthusiastical minds is no doubt very strong, but it always acts in conformity to the opinions imprinted upon it at the time of its working, and can no more act against them, than a rapid river can carry a boat against the current of its own stream. Now nothing can be more certain, than that when *Saul* set out for *Damascus* with an authority from the chief priests to bring the Christians which were there, bound to *Jerusalem*\*, an authority solicited by himself, and granted to him at his own earnest desire, his mind was strongly possessed with opinions against *Christ* and his followers. To give those opinions a more active force, his passions at that time concurred, being inflamed in the highest degree by the irritating consciousness of his vast conduct towards them, the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it procured him among the chief priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.

\* Acts ix. 2.

If, in such a state and temper of mind, an enthusiastical man had imagined he saw a vision from heaven denouncing the anger of God against the Christians, and commanding him to persecute them without any mercy, it might be accounted for by the natural power of enthusiasm. But that in the very instant of his being engaged in the fiercest and hottest persecution against them, no circumstance having happened to change his opinions, or alter the bent of his disposition, he should at once imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to be the Apostle of *Christ*, whom but a moment before he deemed an impostor and a blasphemer, that had been justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly incredible, and so far from being a probable effect of enthusiasm, that just a contrary effect must have been naturally produced by that cause. The warmth of his temper carried him violently another way; and whatever delusions his imagination could raise to impose on his reason, must have been raised at that time agreeably to the notions imprinted upon it, and by which it was heated to a degree of

enthusiasm, not in direct contradiction to all those notions, while they remained in their full force.

This is so clear a proposition, that I might rest the whole argument entirely upon it: But, still farther to shew that this vision could not be a phantom of *St. Paul's* own creating, I beg leave to observe, that he was not alone when he saw it; there were many others in company, whose minds were no better disposed than his to the Christian faith. Could it be possible that the imaginations of all these men should at the same time be so strangely affected, as to make them believe that they saw a *great light shining about them, above the brightness of the sun at noon-day*, and heard the sound of *a voice from heaven*\*, though not the words which it spake, when in reality they neither saw, nor heard any such thing? Could they be so infatuated with the conceit of their fancy, as to *fall down from their horses together with Saul* and be *speechless* through

\* Acts ix. 3. xxii. 9.



*fear* \*, when nothing had happened extraordinary either to them or to him; especially considering that this apparition did not happen in the night, when the senses are more easily imposed upon, but at mid-day? If a sudden frenzy had seized upon *Saul*, from any distemper of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company, men of different constitutions and understandings, to have been at once affected in the same manner with him, so that not the distemper alone, but the effects of it, should exactly agree? If all had gone mad together, would not the frenzy of some have taken a different turn, and presented to them different objects? This supposition is so contrary to nature and all possibility, that unbelief must find some other solution, or give up the point.

I shall suppose then, in order to try to account for the vision without a miracle, that as *Saul* and his company were journeying along in their way to *Damascus*, an

\* Acts xxvi. 14. ix. 7.

extraordinary meteor did really happen, which cast a great light, as some meteors will do; at which they being affrighted, fell to the ground in the manner related. This might be possible; and fear, grounded on ignorance of such phænomena, might make them imagine it to be a vision from God. Nay even the voice or sound they heard in the air, might be an explosion attending this meteor, or at least there are those who would rather recur to such a supposition as this, however incredible, than acknowledge the miracle. But how will this account for the distinct words heard by *St. Paul*, to which he made answer? How will it account for what followed upon it when he came to *Damascus*, agreeably to the sense of those words which he heard? How came *Ananias* to go to him there, and say, ‘He was chosen by God to know his will, and see that just one, and hear the voice of his mouth\*?’ Or why did he propose to him *to be baptized*†? What con-

\* Acts xxii. 14.

† Acts xxii. 16.

nection was there between the meteor which *Saul* had seen, and these words of *Ananias*? Will it be said that *Ananias* was skilful enough to take advantage of the fright he was in at that appearance, in order to make him a Christian: But could *Ananias* inspire him with a vision in which he saw him before he came\*? If that vision was the effect of imagination, how was it verified so exactly in fact? But allowing that he dreamt by chance of *Ananias*'s coming, and that *Ananias* came by chance too, or, if you please, that having heard of his dream, he came to take advantage of that, as well as of the meteor which *Saul* had seen, will this get over the difficulty? No, there was more to be done. *Saul* was struck blind, and had been so for three days. Now had this blindness been natural from the effects of a meteor or lightning upon him, it would not have been possible for *Ananias* to heal it, as we find that he did, merely by putting his hands on him and speaking a few words..

\* Acts ix.

This undoubtedly surpassed the power of nature; and if this was a miracle, it proves the other to have been a miracle too, and a miracle done by the same *Jesus Christ*. For *Ananias*, when he healed *Saul*, spoke to him thus; *Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost* \*. And that he saw *Christ* both now and after this time †, appears not only by what he relates, *Acts* xxii. 17, 18, but by other passages in his epistles, *1 Cor.* ix. 1. xvi. 8. From *him* (as he asserts in many places of his epistles) he learned the Gospel by immediate Revelation, and by him he was sent to the Gentiles, *Acts* xxii. 31. xxiii. 11. Among those Gentiles from *Jerusalem*, and round about to *Illyricum*, he preached the Gospel of *Christ* with mighty signs and wonders wrought by the power of the Spirit of God, to make them obedient to his preaching ‡, as he testifies himself in his Epistle to the *Romans*, and of which

\* *Acts* ix. 17, 18. xxii. 13.† *Acts* ix. 17.‡ *Rom.* xv. 19.



a particular account is given to us in the Acts of the Apostles; signs and wonders indeed, above any power of nature to work, or of imposture to counterfeit, or of enthusiasm to imagine. Now does not such a series of miraculous acts, all consequential to and dependent upon the first Revelation, put the truth of that Revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And if he could so have imposed on himself as to think that he worked them when he did not (which supposition cannot be admitted, if he was not all that time quite out of his senses), how could so *dissempered an enthusiast* make such a progress, as we know that he did, in converting the Gentile world? If the difficulties which have been shewn to have obstructed that work were such as the ablest impostor could not overcome, how much more insurmountable were they to a madman?

It is a much harder task for unbelievers to account for the success of St. Paul, in preaching the Gospel, upon the supposition of his having been an enthusiast, than of

his having been an impostor. Neither of these suppositions can ever account for it; but the impossibility is more glaringly strong in this case than the other. I could enter into a particular examination of all the miracles recorded in the acts to have been done by *St. Paul*, and shew that they were not of a nature in which enthusiasm, either in him, or the persons he worked them upon, or the spectators, could have any part. I will mention only a few. When he told *Elymas* the forcerer, at *Paphos*, before the *Roman* deputy, that *the hand of God was upon him, and he should be blind, not seeing the sun for a season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand\**; had enthusiasm in the doer or sufferer any share in this act? If *Paul*, as an enthusiast, had thrown out this menace, and the effect had not followed, instead of converting the deputy, as we are told that he did, he would have drawn on himself

\* Acts xiii.

his

his rage and contempt. But the effect upon *Elymas* could not be caused by enthusiasm in *Paul*; much less can it be imputed to an enthusiastick belief in that person himself, of his being struck blind, when he was not, by those words of a man whose preaching he strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we ascribe the conversion of *Sergius*, which happened upon it, to any enthusiasm. A *Roman* proconsul was not very likely to be an enthusiast; but had he been one, he must have been bigotted to his own gods, and so much the less inclined to believe any miraculous power in St. *Paul*. When at *Troas*\*, a young man named *Eutychus* fell down from a high window, while *Paul* was preaching, and was taken up dead. Could any enthusiasm, either in *Paul* or the congregation there present, make them believe, that by that Apostle's falling upon him and embracing him, he was restored to life? Or could he who was so restored contribute any thing to it himself, by any power of

\* Acts xx. 9.

his own imagination? When, in the isle of *Melita*, where *St. Paul* was shipwrecked, there came a viper and fastened on his hand, which he shook off, and felt no harm\*; was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety against the bite of a viper without any remedy being applied to it, but would that hope have prevented his death? Or were the barbarous islanders, to whom this Apostle was an absolute stranger, prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that any miracle would be worked to preserve him? On the contrary, when they saw the viper hang on his hand, they said among themselves, ‘No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.’ I will add no more instances: these are sufficient to shew that the miracles told of *St. Paul*, can no more be ascribed to enthusiasm than to imposture.

\* Acts xxvii.

But



But moreover, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul; it was also communicated to the churches he planted in different parts of the world. In many parts of his first Epistle he tells the *Corinthians* \*, that they had among them many miraculous graces and gifts, and gives them directions for the more orderly use of them in their assemblies. Now I ask, whether all that he said upon that head is to be ascribed to enthusiasm? If the *Corinthians* knew that they had among them no such miraculous powers, they must have regarded the author of that Epistle as a man out of his senses, instead of revering him as an Apostle of God.

If, for instance, a Quaker should, in a meeting of his own sect, tell all the persons assembled there, that *to some among them was given the gift of healing by the spirit of God, to others the working of other miracles, to others divers kinds of tongues*, they would undoubtedly account him a madman, be-

\* 1 Cor. xii. 4, 5.

cause they pretend to no such gifts. If indeed they were only told by him that they were inspired by the Spirit of God in a certain ineffable manner, which they alone could understand, but which did not discover itself by any outward, distinct operations, or signs, they might mistake the impulse of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but they could not believe, *against the conviction of their own minds*, that they spoke tongues they did not speak, or healed distempers they did not heal, or worked other miracles, when they worked none. If it be said, the *Corinthians* might pretend to these powers, though the Quakers do not; I ask, whether in that pretension they were impostors, or only enthusiasts? If they were impostors, and St. Paul was also such, how ridiculous was it for him to advise them, in an Epistle writ *only to them, and for their own use*, not to value themselves too highly upon those gifts; to pray for one rather than another, and prefer charity to them all! Do associates in fraud talk such a language to one another? But if we suppose

suppose their pretension to all those gifts was an effect of enthusiasm, let us consider how it was possible that he and they could be so cheated by that enthusiasm, as to imagine they had such powers when they had not.

Suppose that enthusiasm could make a man think, that he was able by a word or a touch to give sight to the blind, motion to the lame, or life to the dead: would that conceit of his make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead revive? And if it did not, how could he persist in such an opinion; or, upon his persisting, escape being shut up for a madman? But such a madness could not infect so many at once, as St. Paul supposes at *Corinth* to have been endowed with the gift of healing, or any other miraculous powers. One of the miracles which they pretended to was the speaking of languages they never had learned. And St. Paul says, he possessed this gift *more than them all* \*. If this had been a delusion of

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 18.

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fancy, if they had spoke only gibberish, or unmeaning sounds, it would soon have appeared when they came to make use of it where it was necessary, *viz.* in converting those who understood not any language they naturally spoke. *St. Paul* particularly, who travelled so far upon that design, and had such occasion to use it, must soon have discovered that this imaginary gift of the Spirit was no gift at all, but a ridiculous instance of *frenzy*, which had possessed both him and them. But if those he spoke to in diverse tongues understood what he said, and were converted to *Christ* by that means, how could it be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, none are more clear from any possible imputation of being the effect of an enthusiastick imagination than this. For how could any man think that he had it, who had it not? or if he did think so, not be undeceived when he came to put his gift to the proof? Accordingly, I do not find such a power to have been ever pretended to by any enthusiast, ancient or modern.

If



If then St. *Paul* and the church of *Corinth* were not deceived in ascribing to themselves this miraculous power, but really had it, there is the strongest reason to think, that neither were they deceived in the other powers to which they pretended; as the same spirit which gave them that, equally could, and probably would, give them the others, to serve the same holy ends for which that was given. And, by consequence, St. *Paul* was no enthusiast in what he wrote upon that head to the *Corinthians*, nor in other similar instances where he ascribes to himself, or to the churches he founded, any supernatural graces and gifts. Indeed they who would impute to imagination effects such as those which St. *Paul* imputes to the power of God attending his mission, must ascribe to imagination the same omnipotence which he ascribes to God.

Having thus, I flatter myself, satisfactorily shewn that St. *Paul* could not be an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself, I am next to enquire, whether he was deceived by the

fraud of others, and whether all that he said of himself can be imputed to the power of that deceit? But I need say little to shew the absurdity of this supposition. It was morally impossible for the disciples of *Christ*, to conceive such a thought as that of turning his persecutor into his Apostle, and to do this by a fraud, in the very instant of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. But could they have been so extravagant as to conceive such a thought, it was physically impossible for them to execute it in a manner we find his conversion to have been effected. Could they produce a light in the air which at mid-day was brighter than that of the sun? Could they make *Saul* hear words from out of that light which were not heard by the rest of the company\*? Could they make him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall off from his eyes, and restore him to his sight by a word? Beyond dispute, no fraud could do these things, but much less still:

\* Acts xxii. 9.

could

could the fraud of others produce those miracles subsequent to his conversion, in which he was not passive, but active, which he did himself, and appeals to in his Epistles as proofs of his divine mission. I shall then take it for granted that he was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of that deceit, no more than to wilful imposture, or to enthusiasm; and then it follows, that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and *therefore the Christian religion is a Divine Revelation.*

That that conclusion is fairly and undeniably drawn from the premises, I think must be owned, unless some probable cause can be assigned, to account for those facts so authentically related in the Acts of the Apostles, and attested in his Epistles by St. Paul himself, other than any of those which I have considered; and this I am confident cannot be done. It must be therefore accounted for by the power of God.

That

That God should work miracles for the establishment of a most holy religion, which, from the insuperable difficulties that stood in the way of it, could not have established itself without such an assistance, is no way repugnant to human reason: but that without any miracle such things should have happened as no adequate natural causes can be assigned for, is what human reason cannot believe.

To impute them to magick, or the power of Dæmons (which was the resource of the *Heathens* and *Jews* against the notoriety of the miracles performed by *Christ* and his Disciples) is by no means agreeable to the notions of those who in this age disbelieve Christianity. It will therefore be needless to shew the weakness of that supposition: But that supposition itself is no inconsiderable argument of the truth of the facts. Next to the Apostles and Evangelists, the strongest witnesses of the undeniable force of that truth are *Celsus* and *Julian*, and other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were obliged to solve what they could not

not



not contradict, by such an irrational and absurd imagination.

The dispute was not then between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition ascribed to cabalistical names, or magical secrets, such operations as carried along with them evident marks of the Divine power: religion ascribed them to God, and reason declared itself on that side of the question. Upon what grounds then can we now overturn that decision? Upon what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony given by *St. Paul*, that he was called by God to be a Disciple and Apostle of *Christ*? It has been shewn, that we cannot impute it either to enthusiasm or fraud; how shall we then resist the conviction of such a proof? Does the doctrine he preached contain any precepts against the law of morality, that natural law written by God in the hearts of mankind? If it did, I confess that none of the arguments I have made use of could prove such a doctrine to come from *him*. But this is so far from being the case, that  
even

even those who reject Christianity as a Divine Revelation, acknowledge the morals delivered by *Christ* and by his Apostles to be worthy of God. Is it then on account of the mysteries in the Gospel that the facts are denied, though supported by evidence, which in all other cases would be allowed to contain the clearest conviction, and cannot in this be rejected without reducing the mind to a state of absolute scepticism, and overturning those rules by which we judge of all evidence, and of the truth or credibility of all other facts? But this is plainly to give up the use of our understanding where we are able to use it most properly, in order to apply it to things of which it is not a competent judge. The motives and reasons upon which Divine wisdom may think proper to act, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie out of the reach of our understanding; but the motives and reasons of human actions, and the manner in which they are performed, are all in the sphere of human knowledge; and upon them we may judge,

with

with a well-grounded confidence, when they are fairly proposed to our consideration.

It is incomparably more probable that a Revelation from God concerning the ways of his Providence, should contain in it matters above the capacity of our minds to comprehend, than that St. *Paul*, or indeed any of the other Apostles should have acted, as we know that they did, upon any other foundations than certain knowledge of *Christ's* being risen from the dead; or should have succeeded in the work they undertook, without the aid of miraculous powers. To the former of these propositions I may give my assent without any direct opposition of reason to faith; but in admitting the latter, I must believe against all those probabilities that are the rational grounds of assent.

Nor do they who reject the Christian religion, because of the difficulties which occur in its mysteries, consider how far that objection will go against other systems, both of religion and of philosophy, which they themselves profess to admit. There are in *Deism* itself, the most simple of all religious opinions,

opinions, several difficulties, for which human reason can but ill account; which may therefore be not improperly stiled *Articles of Faith*. Such is the origin of evil under the government of an all-good and all-powerful God; a question so hard, that the inability of solving it in a satisfactory manner to their apprehensions, has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the monstrous and senseless opinions of *Manicheism*, and *Atheism*. Such is the reconciling the prescience of *God* with the free-will of man, which, after much thought on the subject, Mr. *Locke* \* fairly confesses he could not do, though he acknowledged both; and what Mr. *Locke* could not do, in reasoning upon subjects of a metaphysical nature, I am apt to think few men, if any, can hope to perform.

Such is also the creation of the world at any supposed time, or the *eternal production* of it from God; it being almost equally hard, according to mere philosophical no-

\* See his Letter to Mr. *Molynæus*, p. 509. v. 3.

tions,



tions, either to admit that the goodness of God could remain unexerted through all eternity before the time of such a creation, let it be set back ever so far, or to conceive an *eternal production*; which words, so applied, are inconsistent and contradictory terms; the solution commonly given by a comparison to the emanation of light from the sun, not being adequate to it, or just; for light is a *quality* inherent in fire, and naturally emaning from it; whereas *matter* is not a *quality* inherent or emaning from the Divine essence, but of a different substance and nature, and if not *independent* and *self-existing*, must have been *created* by a mere act of the Divine will; and if *created*, then not *eternal*, the idea of *creation* implying a time *when the substance created did not exist*. But if, to get rid of this difficulty, we have recourse, as many of the ancient philosophers had, to the *independent existence of matter*, then we must admit *two self-existing principles*, which is quite inconsistent with genuine theism, or natural reason. Nay, could *that* be admitted,

mitted, it would not yet clear up the doubt, unless we suppose not only the eternal existence of matter independent of God, but that it was from eternity in the *order* and *beauty* we see it in now, without any *agency* of the Divine power; otherwise the same difficulty will always occur, why it was not before put into that *order* and state of *perfection*; or how the goodness of God could so long remain in a state of inaction, *unexerted* and *unemployed*. For were the time of such an *exertion* of it put back ever so far; if, instead of five or six thousand years, we were to suppose millions of millions of ages to have passed since the world \* was reduced out of a *Chaos* to an *harmonious* and *regular form*, still a whole *eternity* must have preceded that date, during which the Divine attributes did not exert themselves in that *beneficent work*, so suitable to them,

\* By the world I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material *universe*, with all its inhabitants. Even *created spirits* fall under the same reasoning; for they must also have had a *beginning*, and before that *beginning* an *eternity* must have preceded.

that

that the conjectures of human reason can find no cause for its being delayed.

But because of these difficulties, or any other that may occur in the system of Deism, no wise man will deny the *being* of God, or his *infinite wisdom, goodness, and power*, which are proved by such evidence as carries the clearest and strongest conviction, and cannot be refused without involving the mind in *far greater difficulties*, even in downright *absurdities* and *impossibilities*. The only part therefore that can be taken is, to account in the best manner that our weak reason is able to do, for such seeming objections; and where *that* fails, to acknowledge its weakness, and acquiesce under the certainty, that our very imperfect knowledge or judgment cannot be the measure of the Divine wisdom, or the universal standard of truth. So likewise it is with respect to the *Christian religion*. Some *difficulties* occur in that Revelation, which human reason can hardly clear; but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing, that it cannot be denied

without much *greater difficulties* than those that attend the belief of it; as I have before endeavoured to prove, we ought not to reject it upon such objections, however mortifying they may be to our pride. *That* indeed would have all things made plain to us; but God has thought proper to proportion our knowledge to our *wants*, not our *pride*. All that concerns our *duty* is clear; and as to other points either of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some obscurities in them, is that any reasonable cause of complaint? Not to rejoice in the benefit of what he has graciously allowed us to know, from a presumptuous disgust at our incapacity of knowing more, is as absurd as it would be to refuse to *walk*, because we cannot fly. ♦

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical reasonings, aiming at matters above our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions of the old heathen world, before the Gospel was preached to bring man back again to the primitive faith; and from the same



source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of the Evangelical truth, and the most inveterate prejudices against it: an effect just as natural as for our eyes to grow weak, and even blind, by being strained to look at objects too distant, or not made for them to see.

Are then our intellectual faculties of no use in religion? Yes, undoubtedly, of the most necessary use, when rightly employed. The proper employment of them is to distinguish its genuine doctrines from others erroneously or corruptly ascribed to it; to consider the importance and purport of them, with the connection they bear to one another; but first of all to examine with the strictest attention the evidence by which religion is proved, *internal* as well as *external*. If the *external* evidence be convincingly strong, and there is no *internal* proof of its falshood, but much to support and confirm its truth, then surely no difficulties ought to prevent our giving a full assent and belief to it. It is our duty indeed to endeavour to find the best solutions

we can to them ; but where no satisfactory ones are to be found, it is no less our duty to acquiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours.

Nor let it be said, that this will be an argument for the admitting all doctrines, however absurd, that may have been grafted upon the Christian faith. Those which can plainly be proved *not to belong to it*, fall not under the reasoning I have laid down (and certainly none do belong to it which contradict either our *clear, intuitive knowledge*, or the *evident principles and dictates of reason*). I speak only of difficulties which attend the belief of the Gospel in some of its pure and essential doctrines, plainly and evidently delivered there, which, being made known to us by a *Revelation* supported by *proofs* that our reason *ought to admit*, and not being such things as it can *certainly know to be false*, must be received by it as *objects of faith*, though they are such as it could not have discovered by any natural means, and such as are difficult to be conceived,

ceived, or satisfactorily explained, by its limited powers. If *the glorious light of the Gospel* be sometimes overcast with clouds of doubt, so is the light of our *reason* too. But shall we deprive ourselves of the advantage of *either*, because those clouds cannot perhaps be entirely removed while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we obstinately and frowardly shut our eyes against *that day-spring from on high that has visited us*, because we are not as yet able to bear the full blaze of his beams? Indeed, not even in heaven itself, not in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can ever attain, will all the counsels of Providence, all the *height* and the *depth* of the infinite wisdom of God, be ever disclosed or understood. *Faith* even then will be necessary; and there will be *mysteries* which cannot be penetrated by the most exalted archangel, and *truths* which cannot be known by him otherwise than from *Revelation*, or believed upon any other ground of assent than a *submissive confidence in the Divine wisdom*. What, then, shall man presume that his weak and  
narrow

narrow understanding is sufficient to guide him *into all truth*, without any need of *Revelation* or *Faith*? Shall he complain that *the ways of God are not like his ways*, and *past his finding out*? True philosophy, as well as true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and modefter part. It would teach us to be content within those bounds which God has assigned to us, *casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* \*.

\* 2 Cor. x. 5.



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